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The Nation's truest Shield.

# A SERMON,

PREACHED AT

*Messrs. Gales & Seaton*  
*from John Seaton*

BLADENSBURG, MARYLAND,

ON THANKSGIVING-DAY,

THURSDAY, 28 Nov., 1850,

BY THE

REVEREND WILLIAM PINKNEY,

ETC. ETC. ETC.

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Published by Request.  
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BALTIMORE:  
D. BRUNNER, 4 N. CHARLES STREET.

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1851.

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## S E R M O N , E T C .

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“THE SHIELDS OF THE EARTH BELONG UNTO GOD.”

PSALM XLVII. 9.

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ONCE more, in the order of Divine Providence, permitted to leave our quiet and happy homesteads, we have gathered around this holy altar, to thank God, I trust with heartfelt gratitude, for the civil and religious blessings we enjoy and those other munificent gifts which have strewed our pathway since we were last assembled to acknowledge His unmerited grace and goodness to us as a Nation. It is a high and holy duty that now devolves upon us. The review of the past, so full of thrilling and soul-stirring incident, is the pleasing and, it is to be hoped, may prove to be the profitable employment of the present moment; a survey of the dispensations of God's providence, not for the cold and selfish gratification of a heartless pride, but for the stirring up within us of the flame of gratitude, and the deepening and expansion within us of that noble and heaven-born principle. Such a retrospect as will make us wiser and better men. Gratitude is the offering due—a Nation's gratitude; and I trust that gratitude is the offering presented;—not merely the acknowledgement with the lips, of the goodness tasted, and the recognition of the source whence it sprung, but the real, spontaneous out-gushing of the finer sympathies and affections of the heart.

That this feeling may be the more deeply imbedded in the national bosom, and that each member of the body politic may be the more powerfully wrought upon and excited, we propose to recapitulate the list of the blessings we enjoy. There is always a rich variety in the experience of the past; a freshness and moral charm in the dealings of God, which tend to relieve the tedium of the retrospect and impart to it the attractiveness of novelty. No two years are precisely alike. There may be, as indeed most frequently there is, the same exhibition of abundance or want, the falling of the refreshing dew-drop or withering blight; but still in the attendant circumstances, in the threads.

of the golden woof, there will be always found those peculiar and distinguishing marks, which give novelty to the sameness, and relieve it of its dull monotony.

In our review of the past, we must be careful not merely to glance at the wonder-workings of Providence, but to study them closely, so that we may detect, in their marvellous combination, all their secret springs. We must aspire to be wise and discriminating observers; profound students of that most beautiful and interesting of all sciences, the knowledge of God's ways to us, the methods of His all-wise providence; for it is manifest that the real debt of our individual and national gratitude can only be ascertained by a minute examination of the *wonders* of Divine Providence as exhibited in the *every-day developments* of life. Not unfrequently there are amazing mercies wrapped up in comparatively seeming insignificant transactions; circumstances so minute as to escape the notice or observation of the great mass of mankind. The pious observer possesses, in *faith*, a sort of magnifying glass which is constantly revealing, in the floating atoms above or beneath him, agencies for good, mysteries of love, that are actively working out for him invaluable and inestimable blessings. We must, then, individually so review the past, as to call up before our mind's eye, each important incident, that we may, by meditation upon it, enkindle upon the altar of our hearts the flame of unfeigned thankfulness.

But to begin. We had an abundant harvest. Our granaries are well filled. Thrift has followed enterprise, in all the departments of human life. We have enough and to spare; and yet we have had extraordinary seasons during the year. At one time, we seemed, in this particular section of the country, to swing like the pendulum, between abundance and actual distress. The stormy winds were let loose from their deep caverns, to sob and howl about our path and threaten desolation and ruin, at a time when they are usually lulled into repose. Our hopes of the promised harvest seemed to be almost withered in the bud. But God interposed. He brought judgment near enough to be seen and felt by us. He made us quake and tremble at its near approach; and then, almost by miracle, he snatched us from the jaws of pinching want and deep distress. The storm-wind sported with the work of our hands, and tore to tatters the delicate leaves of the most important of the growing crops, and then left us the picture of desolation. Every where, and in many objects of external nature, you perceived signs of its presence, sad proofs of its power. The heart of the most confident began to droop, and became desponding. But in our ex-

tremity, God stepped forth and snatched us from the brink of impending disaster. Seasons the most propitious, precisely suited to our existing necessities, followed in the foot-prints of the stormy wind and tempest; as if to restore beauty and bloom to the altered face of nature. The more than ordinary congeniality of the climate, the frequent showers, and refreshing rays of a tempered sun, brought to the drooping vegetation renewed health and fruitfulness; and the result has been a good and ample harvest. *Plenty* is in our midst; and oh! there is, in that one word a fund of meaning. The pampered and the prosperous can scarce realize the tithe of the blessedness, the word imports. Could we go to the barren and inhospitable wilds, where penury stalks abroad in tattered garments and with cold, cadaverous look, or even to destitute portions of civilized Europe, we should find a tongue to express and a heart to conceive the blessedness of having enough and to spare. Every department of business is in a flourishing condition. The bounties of Providence are lavishly bestowed; and cold must be the heart, that does not, in promptest and most cordial response to the call of the Executive, leap forth to acknowledge the debt of gratitude we owe to the God of Nations. The blight that falls upon the earth's vegetation, the judgement that lays waste our fertile fields, must wither and consume for the time every other branch of human business; for it is the earth's produce, that keeps the weaver's shuttle in active motion, fills the flowing canvass on the watery main, and feeds the ten thousand other rivulets of human enterprise and skill. Without *these*, the Nation could not rise to moral and intellectual grandeur and glory; but without *this*, she could not continue to exist.

We not only have enough, but we are permitted to enjoy what we have. We are singularly preserved from the arm of violence and of fraud. Good laws, administered by watchful rulers of our own choice, are our protection; the precious guarantees, that what we own, we shall continue to possess. The mighty, invisible, but still real and effective, defence of Law, is a blessing, which no American citizen can duly appreciate. He must visit countries where this veneration and dread of law are not felt, to behold, by the light of contrast, the moral power and beauty of the system under which we live. Thus guarded and protected, we have every thing to encourage and stimulate us in the pursuit of secular blessings; a rich heritage from the Lord to reward our toil, and repay the ardor of our enterprise.

But not less conspicuous, and far more important, are the continuation and preservation of our religious blessings, which have already done more to elevate us in the scale of Nations,

than all else beside. We can worship God, as our own conscience, enlightened by His Word, dictates, under our own vine and fig-tree, with none to make us afraid. The religious tolerance, which for the first time our pious forefathers in Maryland wove into the noble banner they unfurled, and infused into the government they established, still continues to be the rich heritage not only of her sons, but of every freeman that treads upon our united soil. None here are doomed to the horrors of coercion, by fire or sword. All are left free to do for themselves in matters of faith, in just responsibility to God for all they do amiss. Light and knowledge are the moral agencies employed in the building up of the Kingdom of God on the earth. Who among us, dearly beloved, can look over the glorious and inestimable spiritual privileges we enjoy without feeling in his inmost soul the obligation to be grateful?—We have the Cross of Christ, set up in the Church He established. The light of the golden candlesticks in the midst of the Temple is as yet undimmed. We have unrestricted access to the means of grace, one and all. We are permitted to see the true ark with our own eyes. Not only so—we have been allowed to enter it, and ours is the sweet satisfaction of knowing that it is the ark the fishermen built more than eighteen hundred years ago, which must continue until the trump shall sound, and the Church Militant be absorbed and swallowed up in the Church Triumphant. Such, dearly beloved, is our spiritual inheritance!

Oh! is it not a subject of profound rejoicing, that we are, as a State and Nation, precisely what we were, save in those wondrously expansive elements of power, which develope a Nation's growth so marvellously? We occupy the same high ground; we stand upon the same broad platform; we are encircled by the same clustering stars, and wrapped in the folds of the same national flag. We are the same happy, united confederacy that we were when the first thanksgiving song floated over the Chesapeake's blue waves, or was echoed from the shores of the bold and beautiful Potomac. We are a more powerful people. Our area of empire is widened and extended. The sun of our glory, whose rising is on the broad, blue Atlantic, now sinks to his rest on the mild Pacific wave. We claim jurisdiction from the one to the other ocean. Millions now walk in freedom's high-way, where, not a century ago, a handful fought and bled in freedom's cause. But still the change is not in quality, but degree. In all the developements of power, of national aggrandizement and glory, we are changed from what we were; but not in the elements themselves. We are changed, as manhood is changed from boyhood; the sturdy oak with its giant branches, from the

little sapling, that bends and bows itself before the howling tempest : but no otherwise. Our castle is our Country still, our whole country. The stars are multiplied, not diminished, in the milky way of freedom. One banner still covers us. It is Washington's own ensign. The bird of our destiny is still the same ; it is the soaring eagle, with expanded wing and eye of flame. And shall we not thank Providence that so it is—that Time, with other destructive agencies, has not gnawed in two the cable which holds us to the rock and keeps us one? Shall we not rejoice, that we can still look North and South, East and West, and exultingly exclaim, behold this is our country? Shall we not mingle our mutual congratulations, that one flag still floats over us ; that we still inhabit the temple of freedom, which Washington loved for its symmetry and the awful grandeur of its proportions, and in which it was his heart's desire that the torch-light of Liberty once kindled should never go out?

This has been an eventful year. The question of the continued, permanent preservation of this Union has been gravely debated ; and the issues of its rupture seriously weighed by Northern and Southern factionists. Yes, the Union, the holy compact which our fathers formed after full and mature deliberation, binding together as it does the opposite sections of this proud Republic, has been openly and unblushingly assailed. The advantages of dis-union have been canvassed. Many have approached the dark precipice, and persuaded themselves that the yawning gulf presents no hideous and forbidding spectacle ; words, that in the elder days of the Republic would have fallen in a sort of shuddering whisper upon the ear, and then been indignantly remanded back to the source whence they proceeded, have been bandied about as watch-words, by those who are looking to the setting sun, and hope to read our destiny, as a nation, in that declining luminary. It ill becomes me, or the place I occupy, to sit in judgement upon the motives or arraign the conduct of either section of disunionists ; but surely, when preaching to my countrymen, of our national blessings, and appealing to them to send forth their song of thanksgiving for their continuance, I may be permitted to point their admiring eye to the glorious Union, which is the one great and august embodiment of the Nation's glory, the source of her richest peace and most enduring prosperity, the charm of our national existence, and the talisman that has so long warded off national shipwreck and ruin ; I may be permitted to express my surprise, that the descendants of '76 should so soon lose sight of the moderation and love of country in all its integrity, which was the ruling spirit of the Revolution ; or seek to subvert a system of govern-

ment never before equalled, and never to be equalled. Looking upon this *chef d'œuvre* among the prodigies of their day, the patriots of '76; and beholding it in the very brightness of its youth, before it has attained the zenith of its glory; I may be permitted to say to the North "give up," and to the South, "hold not back." Mutual concession was the basis of our present confederacy; and mutual concession, the very spirit and principle of the constitution, must be its continued preservation. Whoever touches that broad principle of mutual concession, or refuses to stand by the noble compromise of the constitution, is a *traitor*; be he Northern or Southern factionist.

There are those who will tell you that the North will be eclipsed by the South, or the South by the North; that the one adds more than the other, to the power, dignity, true glory and granite strength of the Union. The stars shine not to eclipse each other, but to *blend* their brilliant rays. They pour forth, side by side, their bright, reflected beams. They are not opposing luminaries. They love to harmonize; and it is the mingling of their *united* rays which gives such brilliancy to the whole upper sky. So it is with the various portions of this grand confederacy. Each lends vigor, and grace, and beauty to the other. Each gives back a portion of the strength and lustre it receives. I am a Marylander. I love her, the land of my birth, the home of my childish fancies, and the sphere of my manhood's exertions. I love her with that strong, peculiar love which cleaves only to the soil of one's birth—and I know full well that you reciprocate the warm attachment. And she is worthy of our united affection. For where, in this wide world, but upon her soil, were first taught to man those sublime lessons of human liberty? By whom, until it entered into the hearts of our own Maryland sires, was the first idea of a model government set forth in bright embodiment, for the world's admiration and imitation? But we love her none the less, but much the more, as one of that great confederacy, which unfurled the united stars and stripes, on the borders of her national flag. Jealousy of liberty made her cautious, when the foundation-stones were laid, of this august Republic. She scanned closely the principles of the confederation. But from the moment she entered into the family compact, she became an unionist, and has ever since preserved the character of a firm and consistent attachment for the Union. She is an unionist still, and I hope she will be the last to desert and disown the stars and stripes. It was her own illustrious KEY that immortalized the banner of Independence, and gave to the world a lofty and pure conception of the patriot poet in that stirring song, whose tones have thrilled

the heart, not only of American freemen, but the poor down-trodden serfs of petty tyranny, the world over; and is it too great a stretch of the imagination to suppose, that the mother will prove herself worthy of the son? and now that the green sward covers his honored grave, and his memory lives in the floating stars and stripes, that she will never suffer, so long as her patriotic hand and counsel can prevent it, the shreds of that torn banner to disgrace one of her noble battlements; or consent to look out upon a political firmament, no longer lighted up by the glittering constellation, overcast with clouds, portending storm and tempest?

I will not attempt to draw the picture of the scene that would follow upon the breaking up and disruption of the Union. I have no pen or taste for the odious and distasteful task. I would rather expatiate on this bright thanksgiving festival, upon its past wonderful achievements for good, and the still more wonderful achievements it promises for the future; the elements of power it possesses, together with its wonderfully rapid growth; and for what it has done and it is still capable of doing, I would implore you to treasure it. Never suffer its advantages to be canvassed in your presence, or its value to be weighed. He must be an unsafe and dangerous counsellor, who would rally *sectional* feelings against the harmony of the system; and call up the evil passions and prejudices of the North or South, to prey upon the vitals of his country. The United States is our blood-bought heritage. It was ours from the beginning. It is ours still; and God has confirmed the gift by deeds of power and almost miracles of mercy. There was no North, no South, when our patriot forefathers sat in sweet brotherhood, by the council-fires of freedom. Every heart was large enough to embrace the whole, and contented with nothing less.

Some may despair of the Republic. I do not. Troubles may be brooding over the face of the mighty deep. The moaning of the tempest may begin to fall in sadness on the patriot ear. The wild fanaticism of Northern and Southern factionists may threaten this glorious fabric. But still *our* trust is, in the *patriotism* of the masses, and the *God of Providence*. The fruit of an honest, self-sacrificing compromise, it surely will not be left to be shrivelled and blasted by sectional bickerings and obstinate self-will. A man may break up his own family homestead, dash the cup of blessing from the lips of his own unhappy children, and thus prove himself a monster to be loathed and shunned of all. But oh! who will take hold of the pillars of the very temple of freedom, that now offers an asylum and a home to the oppressed of every land, and in the madness of his partisan frenzy

drag it down in ruin upon his own head, and that of the millions who have sought and found in it shelter and protection? A Cataline would be a Brutus compared with such an one.

He, that has read the past, with the eye of intelligent forecast, must know that this Union of States has a mission to fulfil; a mission co-extensive with the world, and coeval with time. She is a sort of *world-trustee*, not merely charged with the filling up the measure of her own individual glory, but the diffusion and spreading abroad of her enlightened principles, the world over. The spark of freedom, that had well nigh gone out in the tyranny and oppression of the old world, was wafted across the ocean to this Western wilderness; and thanks to a kind Providence, it found its way without difficulty to our shores, fanned into increasing brightness by the very breezes that seemed to threaten its extinction; and shall we, the degenerate sons of an illustrious race, *put it out*, ere *half its mission is accomplished*? Shall we suffer the night of disunion to envelope in horrible darkness, the very darkness of despair, this bright inheritance? No, never! Love of our common country, forbid it! Hope and harbinger of the World's peace and glory, forbid it!

Let the North give up the unholy endeavour to sap and undermine the broad foundation of the mighty fabric. Let her cease her unnatural warfare upon the peace and security of the South. Let her patriot sons extinguish the smoking firebrand. Let the North give up, and the South hold not back. The patriots of the North have a great and important work to do, towards the conservation of the peace and harmony of this great Republic. To them the eyes of all true lovers of pure republican principles are looking with intense anxiety. They must step into the breach, and stay the advancing footsteps of a desolating fanaticism, the miserable and sickly spawn, which has usurped a foothold upon Plymouth Rock, and sought a retreat behind those granite hills, which look out upon Lexington and Concord. The Southern members of the confederacy are willing to stand by the compromise of the constitution. They ask for no broader platform than that laid by the sages of '76. They only ask to retain their original sovereignty and jurisdiction within the clearly expressed provisions of the constitution; and what calm and dispassionate friend of those principles, which constitute the basis of our present Union, can fail to see that they can only be preserved inviolate by a firm and dignified adherence to the original compact. The sovereignty of the States, outside the clearly defined limits of the federal jurisdiction, is the vital element, the rich golden woof in the warp of our system of government. Each State is and, from the

nature of the case, must be supreme within the sphere of her own separate jurisdiction. What is surrendered to the general government is surrendered equally, by each, for the common benefit and security. It would be impossible for any one State or section of States to transfuse its own peculiar and sectional views and principles through another, without producing a ruinous and destructive jar in the complex machinery. The period of territorial dependance, through which each successive State must pass, before it can attain the dignity and sublimity of a State existence, must be passed under the one national flag, and beneath the broad panoply of the one constitution, which knits together and *unites* the whole. The territories are the property of the Union, and continue so to be, until they are prepared to exercise within the terms of the constitution their own prerogative of sovereignty; and then the *sovereignty* must be *perfect* and *entire*, not shackled by manacles forged either North or South. Let the patriots of the North redeem then her plighted faith. Breathing the spirit of her noblest Orator and profoundest Statesman,—the living impersonation of all that is grand in eloquence, or convincing in argument, or patriotic in purpose,—let them rally around the floating stars and frown down the spirit of wild fanaticism and reckless aggression, which has even dared to desecrate Fanueil Hall, and speak words of almost treason within sight of Bunker Hill. There must be a rally of the Unionists of the North, or the whirlwind will get beyond control and the sun will set upon the land of Liberty and Law. Let the genius of the Union be once fully aroused, and then will the Nation's heart beat free, at unity with itself. No body believes that the cable, which binds us together, can ever be violently broken by any mere human power; but still all must know and feel, that it may be corroded by bitter sectional feuds, until weaker than a rope of sand, it will be snapped asunder; and then we, who are now the wonder and admiration of the old world, will become the sport of tyranny and the laughing stock of despots; too weak to continue free, and too contemptible to enjoy longer the blessed boon.

Oh then, let the wise and the patriotic of either section make an oblation of the wild and unholy prejudices that threaten to kindle a civil war which neither the Atlantic or Pacific wave could extinguish, upon the altar of their common country! The incendiary's torch, any hand may bear. His work of destruction, any traitor may easily accomplish. But ah! who will build up or new-construct the smouldering ruin? The work of destruction should never be divorced from the power to re-construct. If there be not patriotism sufficient in the North and the

South to stay the idle and fatal excitement, and hold on to the compromise, sanctioned as it is by the constitution, and enbalm-ed in the holiest memories of the past—aye, in the very blood of the revolution—how can we hope for that moderation in counsel, and self renouncing patriotism, which the establishment of a second Union will demand at our hands.

Dearly beloved, let us strive to hold fast to the blessings we now possess and enjoy. The duty we owe to the cause of suffering humanity, the world over, demands it; our duty to ourselves, our illustrious forefathers, and our precious offspring. While we praise God in JESUS CHRIST our LORD, for the rich unmerited boon, let us pray for the gift of a more fraternal feeling, a broader patriotism, a more unselfish spirit, and a more compromising disposition. Let us pray for grace, to be true to our fearful trust. Let us cleave to the Union, water it with our tears, and never suffer ourselves to despair of it. Let us pray more for the country, of which we boast that we are the happy descendants. Let us do what we can to uphold the national ensign. Thankful for what is past, we may then trust God for what is to come.

In reviewing the mercies of the past and the present, it would be equally unwise and unnatural, were we to suffer the sore judgments that were mingled in the cup of our national blessings to pass by unnoticed. Death has been busy in many households. He has cut down without discrimination, the high and low, the rich and poor, the humble citizen, the orator and the statesman. Our Senate chamber has been hung with a sable pall; and weeping senators have bowed beneath the blow which paralyzed the tongue of the eloquent, and hushed the beatings of the patriot heart. The Nation's President has fallen in the midst of the dazzling honors he bore so meekly. In the mansion of his glory was he wrapped in the winding sheet and shroud, and a Nation waited upon his funeral. Naught remains of the departed hero, but his maxims of wisdom, his spotless integrity and burning patriotism. He who would have shielded with his body the banner of his country, is now lost to the councils of that country forever. Oh, may those who are called to occupy the high places of the land, remember the stern and solemn lessons of those melancholy bereavements; and may those in the humbler walks of life, catch the lighted torch as it fell from their paralyzed grasp, and take it with them into the temple of freedom, and so cherish and guard it, that it may never go out in darkness and gloom! May love of country glow in every heart, inspire every tongue, illuminate every deed! May pure religion and unalloyed patriotism constitute, as under God alone they

can, the foundation of our Country's prosperity and "pledge of her perpetuity and renown."

It would be not less unwise to pass by, without deep *national abasement*, the sins which have called down upon us those sore judgments. We have sinned as a nation, and our sins continue to rise up, as a dark cloud, before God. Where is our national gratitude? Where is that righteousness which exalteth a people? Where are the proofs that we fear and honor God, as a country? We have, alas, almost forgotten the God of our fathers; carried away by our imagined invincibility and glory, we have well nigh lost sight of the true source of our hitherto unparalleled national prosperity. "The shields of the earth belong unto God;" but we have, it is to be feared, lost sight of the glorious and ennobling sentiment—and now that our song of thanksgiving is floating along, let us hope that with our gratitude for the past and the present, we shall mingle our repentant tears, and resolve to be a more righteous and godly nation for the future,—the Lord being our helper!

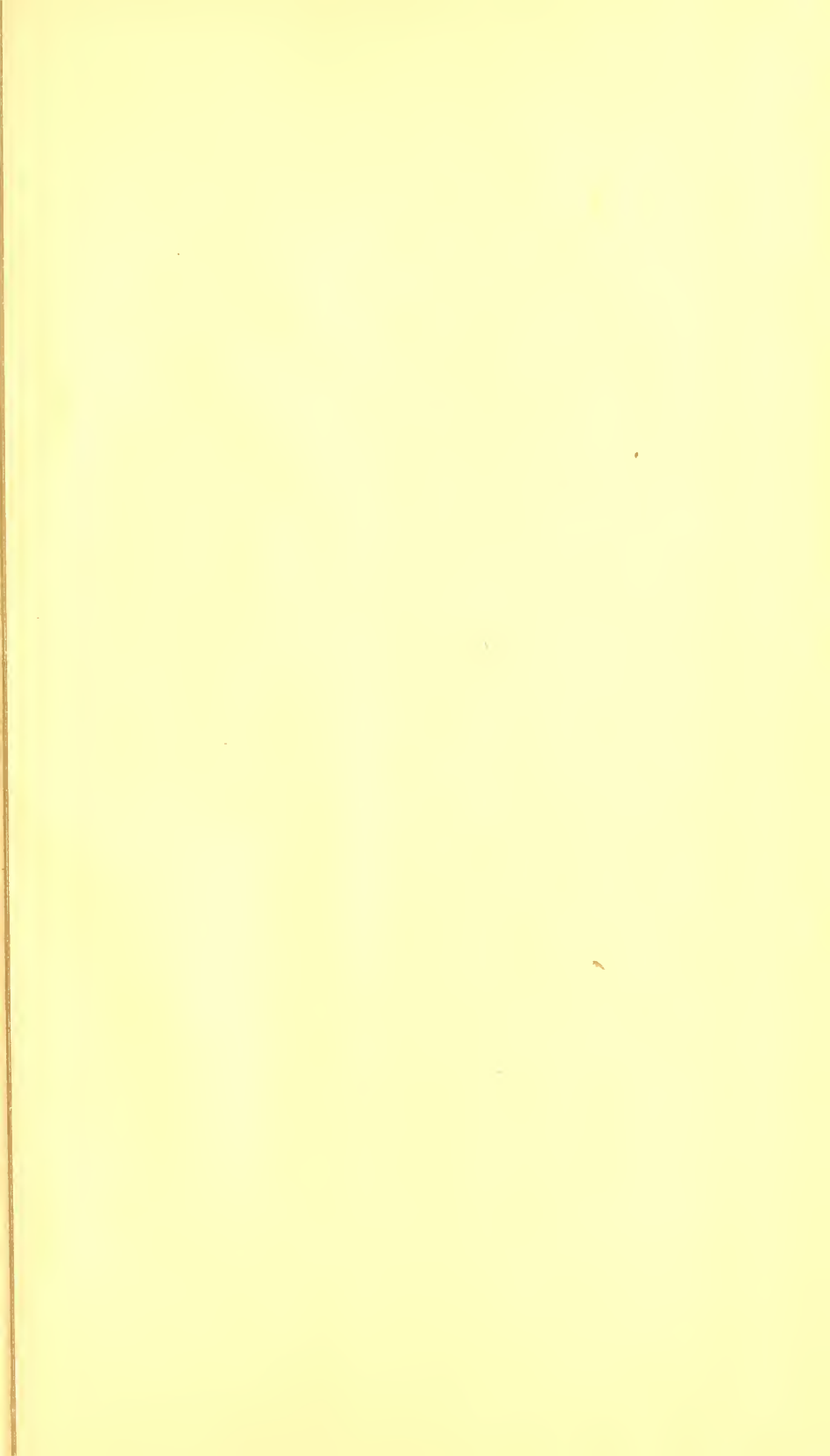








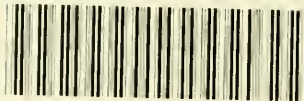








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